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Bard

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Nobody knows how to cast a bell.
We live just long enough to learn.
Then the bell is cast and then the bell tolls.

15 March 2007

= = = = =

What were they talking about
the rain the first snowdrops appear
only today the ides of March
and a foot of snow predicted
by wise men for tomorrow.
What were they talking about
the raindrops on my sleeve
my woolen hat its brim too
dappled with dribble sky
lets us down again the future
is the past turned inside out
the imagination is the past
mistaken for right now
forgive me for these small
white flowers I loved them
for a second in the mud
beside the roaring stream
crazy with the old snow
melting into the momentary
whatever you call this place.

15 March 2007

IDES OF IMPROPRIETY

Not one's own at any rate
like music out of somebody
else's radio, i.e., something
to be endured if not enjoyed.
Dine with Duke Humphrey
they used to say. Eighty-six
in other words, run out of them
too, no more words, just
Sirius music on some gizmo
in the middle distance, sky
in a Dutch painting, all those
people ever owned was sky.
Don't you love the flat world?
Mountains romantic obstacles
at best. Chairlift to Parnassus.
Modernism rose to battle
entrenched academies, fell
before the infantry of MFA.
Modernism is too hard for them,
give them retro cheese of Self
or vanguard flarf, no words
left to our sweet nattering
my dear. Modernism meant
have no gimmicks, make
each encounter with the stupid
paint or paper a new thing.
New thing. One is older than
another. Time has some meaning
still it hides inside its sleeves
left for girls and right for boys
like an unsuccessful tattoo
that suppurates beneath the silk.
Once upon a word the time
meant the reproach a dying
person uttered to his murderers,
used to say them in church
around about now, Lenten-tide
and hot cross buns and why
are the old ladies weeping

thinking blood-soaked ashwood
often? Rhetorical question.
This is the day that Caesar
got it. Even you, my son!
he said in Greek. A strange
language full of verbs, pine
scented afternoons, a knife,
no, I don't speak it either,
nobody does, they all
died with Achilles and went north
where Death keeps his lodging
on the other side of the pool
those people for some strange
reason decided to call Kind
to Strangers, they way we call
fat men Tiny. The things
we dare to do. *Kai su,*
teke, and then he fell,
dozens of puncture wounds
blossomed in his tyrant torso
and so on, republicans
like that sort of rhetoric,
the man is dead now
leave him alone, with Achilles
aforesaid, by the salt marsh
just this side of Odessa
where God has a secret
little dacha he spends His
weekends in (He invented
the week, remember, so it
could end and He have
a place to hide) while
sectaries of divers sorts
howl on the twin Sabbaths.
Of course Death is forced
to listen too. He's the one
who turned the damn thing on.
It sounds like a Bach fugue
played by a high school band.

15 March 2007 (The Poker)

AROUND

Silent dream. The clutch
around the pericardium. Around
around. As if as if. The carousel
will not stop these days
to let the children off.

How long
before the little girl on the lion
begins to doubt?

She chose
this animal because of reputation,
ferocity, dignity, gold mane.

But this is one of those
that don't go up and down
unlike the frivolous ponies
her glad pals mount. She sits
ruling the world and bored.
And the wheel goes round.

How long before I climb
down from my seated dragon
and try my luck with her,
two shy imperialists together?
All thumbs and sixes, not a seven
in my hand, all bells
and no whistles, all jacks
and no trade.

Gimme a chance.
A clutch. A pericardial
welcome like a catch of breath,
spring on a Bic. A snick
of something falling into place.
A scapular round her neck
with pictures on it slung
low along her chest, holy
house of Loreto flew up through

the actual air from Palestine to
Italy, no politics intended.

Even the houses go up and down
and she's still there, sobbing now,
charging forward on her sleeping beast,
her sweaty fingers in his wooden hair.

16 March 2007

APPLE

Who knows what might happen
between there and then? Overboard
like a dud torpedo. Or fall
simply from the hand like an apple
yesterday from the beak of a bothered
crow, let fall at our feet, half-eaten
Granny Smith, we almost picked it
up ourselves, but knew better
than to steal things from a crow.
Who waited on his tree, ten
minutes later we passed again
and he was eating it, holding
it delicately with one foot.
He had come back to
what he needs. They always do.

16 March 2007

NORTHERN COOKING

Of course in a sense worth making
a fuss about the way women did
when we were children, veils and powder
and fuss, that's how they were different
from the sullen men bent over the piano
punching out stride. Men said nothing
and pummeled the piano or pinochle
women wore Evening in Paris and tiny
flower studded gauzy veils that swooped
like bad weather from big hats.
And who were we when they were they?
Worth thinking about that, a garnet
chunk beside a blue knife, what more
does mankind need? Sweet potato pie.
Manhattan clam chowder. Potato pancakes
none complete without a scrape
of knuckle skin from the *ribeisen*.
You know who you are. Pig's knuckles
on Thursday with sauerkraut. Flounder.
Or fluke if they weren't lucky, blue
faced fishermen at Broad Channel.
A world made exclusively of aunts
and uncles. And pianos. And cheese
of a sort, soft, from yellow boxes.

16 March 2007

WE'LL GATHER LILACS

from New Zealand it says
this morning half a world
away a millennium ago Ivor
Novello songs Wellington
Marilyn Hill Smith singing
with a concert orchestra
crikey this is pretty music
why does it linger only
down there with sheep and
water going down the drain
the wrong way round
and snow about to fall on
us up here, we'll gather
lilacs in the spring again
the radio explains, a voice
we tend to trust, anyway
we want it to be true
which is all you can ever
ask of music isn't it, say it,
say it is or isn't always so.

16 March 2007

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There has to be a tendency to say
less than you feel more than you know
that is the pavement on the road
or salt the men put down on snow
the voice of your mother never far
from being heard the way a star
is close when the cloud expires
like the offer from your broker
you leave unregarded on your desk
a fancy name for the kitchen table
because you never do grow up
the world is still at the breakfast stage
and it mingles with all the voices
of your unborn children singing
sweetly from a nearby opera
till you don't know how to face
the mirror and it begins to snow.

16 March 2007

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If I believed in suicide
you'd all be in trouble
but I can't think of any
thing smarter to do
than go on in this long
permission, day, night,
day, night, it means
as much as any wisdom
does, the holy bible of
whatever comes next.

16 March 2007

ESCHATOLOGY

Not sure it's actually here yet
the lurker at the threshold you
keep worrying about or waiting for
it's never clear, like the sky
one minute blue the next minute
and always far away. So far
you think you hear Bird playing
out of the corner of your ear
the way the distant traffic chants
of far and near but never here
for long and all the ones you
cared about so much are gone.

Highways rule. No name
sandwich with coffee hot
enough to substitute for taste.
Loose sugar in tall jars ago.
When it comes a waitress
will be the one to tell you:

“Look up from your stupid book
and watch it lurching by the cars
stepping up the cinderblocks
yanking the screendoor wide
and here it is at last, the one
we all knew was on the way,
we knew better than to say so
but you. You idiot. Catsup
on your upper lip, the sweet
remission called the philtrum
where I impose right now
like it or lump it your last kiss.”

16 March 2007

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Human universe yes yet not secular.
I touch your godforsaken hand
and thrill undertakes us both. Not secular
because the human proper is a god to find
deep or shallow swaddled in the sense of self
another who is you. That god.

17 March 2007

EDUCATION

Encouraging likeness by crayon and soft rough
paper dismays the raw aesthetes in second grade
who already know a thing or two about Mirò,
the art on freezer doors at home. How can I draw
a house when a house has sides and all
you give me to work with is some colors?
Colors are an afterthought of space, a trick
the sunlight plays on us. Give me a stone
and a forest full of wood, give me union workers
who know the difference between up and down.
Colors have no insides. They sleep all the time.

17 March 2007

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He didn't mean to be cynical, it was the wind
wuffling in his jersey that made him rude,
boys are like that, ill-laundered and insecure
hence full of noise and random ceremony
waddling downtown mid their peers. Disgust
enters the equation here. To drink in doubt
until the sun goes out. To lie at home
dreaming of another house, eat your bread
dreaming of a crustier loaf, et cetera. These
are the forgeries of infancy. What they dream
will come to pass. That is the terrible
truth about dreaming. Now the crowd of them
shuffles through the snow, the noise
is in proportion to their numbers, hobbled
by decency they don't do all the things they think.
The god Mercury observes them from this
or that lamppost and decides which of them
should survive till morning. He too
was young once and understands the drill,
the ceaseless sub-clinical infection
of dissatisfaction, the acne of the soul.
They break things because every single
thing around them is a sort of mirror.

17 March 2007

= = = = =

I hate morality. It has dust
between its pages, it has webs
strung between its breasts.
It has ideas that go on thinking
while I try to sleep, it has remorse
that bites me when I watch the sea
or any other passionately neutral thing,
some thing trying hard to forget us
who scratch along its borders
digging out trenches to make towns.
But I do like towns, the lines
turn into avenues, they lead to you,
I do love you, whoever you are,
standing there all beautiful and fresh
even with that rulebook in your hand.

17 March 2007

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'There are sounds in my chest
like voices far away. 'That's why
it's so hard to get back to sleep
plus worrying about the snow.
Maybe they are voices. The Chinese
spoke of 'voices in the valley'
that showed up in meditation
when you reached a certain stage.
I don't think I'm there yet,
I think there are noises in my head
and chest and ears and belly
that may even be natural, even
be normal, not the chatty
envoys of arrogant diseases
busy scheming with my cells.
They may just be voices,
my friends inside, or soldiers
cheering each other up,
infantry in some scarlet-
uniformed army that hurries
one blizzard after another
through empty provinces
feeding on fallen quinces.

17 March 2007

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Basque *boina* on his head, beret
to you or me, but black, black
as history, brrr. It sits there
like a close-capped mushroom
above its pale stalk. But black,
black as language, the noises
that hump out of our mouths
when we least expect it, which
hearing we are most surprised
to understand. And say again.
Black, like bleak, all colors
absent. Black, like the wool
of a certain kind of sheep,
like a close-woven felted cap
snug on a weary traveler's head.
Let him find the way home.

17 March 2007

DISTILL

To turn a thousand afternoons
into one bright morning. The admiral
of terraces studies his vegetable sea.

The value of the character's time
distills some violet-scented topiary
stands around such houses nine
generations.

Chessmen and elephants
with little flowers scenting at their feet.

Or one soft night. Cairo. Passion silk
or tattered linen after grabs of lust,
the old story. We are beasts after all.

What is that nice French word for lawn?
Or not so much lawn as the whole space
where people flounder to build a house
usually in the middle of, grass or no grass.

Table rapping in the salon annoys the
cleaning woman two rooms away. Soon
she'll go home leaving the poets to their
play. She'll gossip about these boring
but dangerous customs of householders.
Ouija boards. Reading books. Eating
food. But these days she lives alone.

17 March 2007

[sent to Eliza Douglas for her musics]